

February 28, 2023

Dear Co-chairs Senator McCrory and Representative Currey, Ranking Members Representative McCarty and Representative Berthel, and distinguished members of the Education Committee:

My name is Alison Carrasco and I live in Windsor Locks, CT. I am testifying in support of S.B. 1095: An Act Concerning School Resource Officers. All students deserve to feel safe, secure, and supported in their places of learning. Yet too often our schools rely on policing to keep children in line, rather than funding professionals trained to deliver students necessary developmental and behavioral health resources. According to research by Connecticut Voices for Children, there is no evidence that School Resource Officers (SROs) make students or staff safer, but schools with SROs have more arrests and more expulsions than their peer institutions without SROs.

The money to fund SROs should instead be used to build an education system that centers students' social-emotional well-being through care, resources, learning, and restoration. I do not want current and future students to have to settle for the experience that my peers and I had almost 20 years ago when we had heavy surveillance and police officers in our schools. I still work on healing through my time in middle school when I was charged with breach of peace after getting in a fight with my classmate. I was an undocumented middle schooler, and secretive about my immigration status which meant that I avoided police officers as much as I could. However, that was unavoidable when I got into a fight in middle school and had to go to court with the classmate that I got into a fight with. My classmate and I were met with punitive consequences and because my classmate was Black, she was blamed for starting the fight. But there was no evidence to prove that. In fact, she was asked to write me an apology letter but that was not expected of me to do for her. This may sound like an isolated incident, but being a non-Black student in Connecticut has shown me that institutional racism is in full effect, treating Black and Brown students as disposable.

Relying on SRO's to solve conflicts causes more harm than actual support for students because it does not dissect and change the root cause of issues that students are facing. After being arrested, I remember being concerned for my classmate because she was experiencing unstable housing and I did not want her to be displaced again. Research that the Black and Brown Student Union (BBSU) has gathered proves that a mediator would have been the best approach to the conflict that me and my classmate were facing as middle schoolers, not court. Thankfully, charges were dropped, but that did not change how it affected my future or hers. In my case, I was suspended and was not allowed to choose my high school course schedule. I had no say in my education, and I fell behind. My family and I saw how this affected me even when I was in college because I had to pay out of pocket to retake classes that I missed out on while in high school due to my middle school suspension.

I would have wanted for younger me to have a better high school experience after being arrested in middle school. But policing and surveillance only got worse when attending Windsor Locks high because the school was heavily surveillanced with cameras, different police officers, and passcodes to get into the bathrooms. Having all this surveillance did not prevent strangers from trespassing and fighting in the school, it did not stop bomb threats from being made or make students feel any safer. If I could go back I would have advocated for school funding to be invested in tutoring, scholarships, and more guidance counselors, instead of policing and surveillance. Today, I am testifying in support of S.B. 1095 in hopes that no more students will experience being criminalized when going to school.

I joined the youth organizing movement in Connecticut when I was nineteen years old. Thanks to youth power, I was able to learn about my rights and felt empowered to fight for improvements in our communities. I have seen first hand how neighborhoods and school environments improve when we take real action to show that we deeply care about the well being of young people. I am proud of the young people today leading the fight to support S.B. 1095. I believe in our young people, and their ability to co-create safe futures when given the proper fundamental support for growth and well being. I invite the Committee and Connecticut lawmakers to do the same. I strongly support S.B. 1095 and I hope the Committee and Connecticut lawmakers will vote in favor of this bill.

Sincerely,

Alison Carrasco